

Message Text

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NOT RELEASABLE TO FOREIGN NATIONALS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
PINT CH
SUBJECT: LEADERSHIP INDECISIVENESS CREATES CREDIBILITY GAP IN PRC

REF: HONG KONG 8716

SUMMARY: EXACERBATED BY THE LEADERSHIP STRUGGLE AT THE
TOP, A NUMBER OF FACTORS HAVE COMBINED TO PRODUCE A CREDI-
BILITY GAP BETWEEN THE CHINESE PEOPLE AND THEIR SENIOR
LEADERSHIP. RECENT SUCCESSES IN EARTHQUAKE RECOVERY AND
THE IMAGE OF A NATION BEGINNING TO PULL TOGETHER AGAIN MAY
SIGNAL THE START OF A EFFORT TO REBUILD NATIONAL CONFIDENCE
IN ITS LEADERS. BUT THE ROAD BACK WILL NEED MORE THAN THE
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TRADITIONAL CHINESE ACCEPTANCE OF EVENTS AS THEY COME TO RESTORE

LEADERSHIP CREDIBILITY AND ACTIVE POPULAR SUPPORT FOR THE
REGIME. END SUMMARY

1. THE POLITICAL POWER STRUGGLE WHICH RESULTED IN THE DISMISSAL OF TENG HSIAO-PING FROM PEKING'S TOP LEADERSHIP COUPLED WITH THE DECLINING HEALTH AND PRESUMABLY IMMINENT DEMISE OF CHAIRMAN MAO TSE-TUNG HAVE COMPLICATED THE LEADERSHIP'S ABILITY TO RESOLVE ISSUE AND TO FUNCTION AS A COLLECTIVE BODY. THE TENG CASE HAS HEIGHTENED RIVALRIES AMONG THE LEADERS AND MAO'S DISABILITIES HAVE INTENSIFIED THE CONTENTION FOR POSITIONS OF INFLUENCE AND CLAIM TO SUCCESSION. ON A NUMBER OF SIGNIFICANT ISSUES, THE LEADERSHIP HAS DIVIDED ALONG IDEOLOGICAL LINES WITH THE RESULT THAT DECISIONS ON MILITARY MODERNIZATION, EDUCATION REFORMS, AND APPOINTMENT OF INDIVIDUALS TO FILL PARTY VACANCIES HAVE REMAINED OUTSTANDING.

2. IN ADDITION TO THE LACK OF CENTER DECISIVENESS ON MAJOR ISSUES, PEKING HAS IMPLICITLY DISCREDITED ITS OWN PRONOUNCEMENTS BY ASSERTIONS THAT LEADERSHIP STATEMENTS, CENTRAL DIRECTIVES, AND "CHOU'S WILL" HAD BEEN FABRICATED OR ALTERED BY TENG AND HIS ASSOCIATES IN AN ATTEMPT TO STRENGTHEN THEIR HAND. A DIRECT CONSEQUENCE OF THESE ASSERTIONS HAS BEEN AN EFFORT BY PROVINCIAL AND REGIONAL BODIES TO INTERPOSE THEMSELVES AS INTERPRETERS OF THE "CORRECT" LINE FROM THE CENTER (HK6595). THIS WEAKENING OF CENTRAL AUTHORITY IN TURN HAS HEIGHTENED LOWER-LEVEL INDEPENDENCE OF ACTION AND HAS CONTRIBUTED TO A GENERAL IMPRESSION OF REGIME INACTIVITY.

3. WITHOUT STRONG CENTER LEADERSHIP, FZCTIONAL DISPUTES WERE REVIVED IN A NUMBER OF PROVINCES. IN ADDITION, SINCE THERE WERE NO STRONG CENTRAL GUIDELNES TO INDICATE THE SCOPE OF PURGES OF TENG SUPPORTERS, GROUPS INSIDE INDIVIDUAL PROVINCES WHICH HAD EARLIER LOST FAVOR SOUGHT TO REGAIN AUTHORITY. THIS FOR A TIME WEAKENED SOME LOCAL POWERHOLDERS AND INCREASED THE SENSE OF LAWLESSNESS IN A NUMBER OF AREAS. WITHOUT HIGHER-LEVEL SUPPORT FOR THEIR FACTION, HOWEVER, THE STRENGTH OF THOSE OPPOSING THE AUTHORITIES IS BEGINNING TO WANE AND PROVINCIAL POWERHOLDERS ARE GRANDUALLY USING THEIR ACCESS TO PROVINCIAL CONTROL ORGANS TO REASSERT THEIR AUTHORITY (HK 9524).

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4. A SERIES OF NATURAL DISASTERS HAVE FURTHER DIVERTED THE ATTENTION OF THE LEADERSHIP, AND TRADITIONAL CHINESE CONCERNS THAT SUCH NATURAL PHENOMENA AFFECT THE POLITICAL COURSE OF THE COUNTRY AND IMPLY THE END OF A DYNASTIC PERIOD HAVE FURTHER HEIGHTENED POPULAR CONCERN THAT CHINA'S LEADERSHIP IS SHAKY (HK 9783). THIS FEAR IS PROBABLY AGGRAVATED BY THE DEATH OF FOUR TOP LEADERS IN THE PAST EIGHTEEN MONTHS.

5. FOR PEKING TO REASSERT PREDOMINANT LEADERSHIP OVER THE PROVINCES SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE SO LONG AS CENTER LEADERSHIP REMAINS DIVIDED OVER THE ISSUE OF TENG AND HOW TO TREAT THE REMAINDER OF HIS "SUPPORTERS." THE AUGUST 23 PEOPLE'S DAILY EDITORIAL, HOWEVER, MAY BE AN INDICATOR THAT PEKING HAS MOVED TO PREVENT A WIDER PURGE (HK 9925). NEVERTHELESS, SINCE MANY OF THE OUTSTANDING NON-CAMPAIGN DECISIONS ARE THEMSELVES CAUGHT UP IN THE FABRIC OF THE TENG CASE, RESOLUTION OF THESE PROBLEMS WILL NOT BE AN EASY TASK. PEKING'S SOLUTIONS TO DATE APPEAR TO BE RATHER TENTATIVE COMPROMISES OR THE CONTINUATION OF EXISTING PROGRAMS ON THE BASIS OF AD HOC DECISIONS. THUS, FOR EXAMPLE, THE MILITARY HAVE CONTINUED WITH SOME ASPECTS OF 1975'S DOCUMENT 18 CALL FOR THE MODERNIZATION OF THE PLA (HK 10253).

6. IN ORDER TO SETTLE PRESSING ISSUES AND BEGIN TO REESTABLISH CONFIDENCE IN CENTRAL AUTHORITY, THE MAJOR FOCUS MUST BE RESOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM OF COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP AT THE TOP. ALTHOUGH HE NO LONGER MAKES EVEN HIS MINIMAL PUBLIC APPEARANCES OF THE PAST FOUR YEARS, THE AILING CHAIRMAN MAO STILL SEEMS TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR HOLDING TOGETHER THE LEADERSHIP. DESPITE HIS INFIRMITIES, MAO APPEARS TO HAVE A LEAVENING EFFECT ON FACTIONAL CONTENTIONS, AT LEAST TO THE EXTENT THAT THE TWO EXTREME WINGS IN THE POLITBURO SEEM CONTENT TO RESTRAIN THEIR JUGULAR INSTINCTS AS LONG AS HE IS ALIVE. NEVERTHELESS, THE JOCKEYING CONTINUES BEHIND THE SCENES WHERE THESE AND OTHER GROUPINGS CONTEND FOR POWER AND INFLUENCE.

7. RECOGNITION THAT NEITHER OF THE TWO EXTREME FACTIONS CAN UNILATERALLY DECIDE QUESTIONS SEEMS TO BE THE NECESSARY PREREQUISITE FOR SETTLEMENT OF THE OUTSTANDING ISSUES. IN ADDITION, RAPID CENTER RESPONSE AND EFFECTIVE COORDINATION MEASURES TO HANDLE THE RELIEF EFFORT FOR THE JULY 28 TANGSHAN EARTHQUAKE
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MAKES PEKING'S LEADERSHIP IMAGE LESS TARNISHED AND COULD SERVE AS A CATALYST FOR REASSERTING CENTER CONTROL OVER THE PROVINCES. HUA KUO-FENG, AS AN ALREADY ACCEPTED COMPROMISE LEADER, COULD HOLD THE KEY TO CARRYING THIS LINE WITHIN THE CENTRAL HIERARCHY. WITH BACKING FROM OTHER MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROADERS AND HIS INCREASED PUBLIC STATURE AS LEADER OF THE EARTHQUAKE RECOVERY EFFORT, HUA COULD CONCEIVABLY FORGE THE KIND OF LEADERSHIP SUPPORT NECESSARY TO CONSOLIDATE CENTRAL DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY AND, FROM THAT POSITION, REASSERT CENTER POWER IN THE PROVINCES. NEVERTHELESS, FOR HUA OR ANYONE ELSE TO DO THIS, PEKING WILL NEED THE ACTIVE COOPERATION OF ITS FACTIONAL GROUPINGS AND A REASSERTION OF POPULAR CONFIDENCE IN THE REGIME. DESPITE THE TREMENDOUS INERTIA IN THINA--WHICH SEEMS TO KEEP THINGS MOVING IN SPITE OF LEADERSHIP INACTIVITY AND INDECISION, REGAINING THAT CONFIDENCE COULD BE THE MOST DIFFI-

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